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THE PHILOSOPHY OF APPAREL.

It should seem strange that, in an age when so much is sacrificed to externals—when so much care is given to mere display, the arts of Architecture and Dress, to which that display and the government of those externals belong, should be so feebly comprehended, and their principles so little studied. Extravagant as the times are (and most especially in America) in expenditure for apparel, we produce less valuable result than the most barbaric nations or times. Our buildings and our dress are alike—heartless, cold and worthless, so far as any effect on the mind is concerned, and as all Art education is the same in principle; and as, to be effective, all teaching must be an elucidation of principles, the artistic training of a people can begin nowhere so well as in its dress, in which we are all concerned, and in which we must perforce produce some kind of result, good or bad, as we work in knowledge and feeling, or in ignorance and indifference.

We believe it to be a great mistake that a large portion of the Christian world lies under, that any study for effect in dress is idle. It is indeed of less importance than our morals, but it need in no wise conflict with them, or divert us from the study of things nobler, for it costs as much both in time and money, to dress badly as to dress well; the gratification of the love of the beautiful being better attained with the harmonious colors than with the costly stuffs, and with daisies and pinks, rather than with diamonds and richly chased and enamelled jewelry. Beauty is as cheap as wild flowers, and no consideration of morality or theology demands that we should prefer a plain or ugly thing to one that is beautiful, where the procuring of the latter, involves neither loss of goodness nor the ability to do good. Indeed, Christianity contemplates the perfection of humanity, and therefore embraces in its scheme the development of every God-given faculty—the least as well as the greatest, and perfection is not given until all are harmoniously wrought out into the perfect human being. If we sacrifice the ability to do good to the love of self-adornment, we sin, not in loving too much to

adorn ourselves, but in loving good works insufficiently. We cannot love anything which is unlovable, but we may neglect that which is most worthy through love for that which is less so; but so long as we do not this, we transgress no moral or spiritual law in loving the beautiful in our apparel. The sin lies rather in putting away the good and joyous gifts of Providence.

Dress is not a mere thing of use, but a means of expressing the essential nature of the wearer—as much an emanation from, and an expression of, his spirit, as his words or his actions—it tells the state his soul keeps in its clay tenement. We all know this—we know that the robe of a king is his dignity—his crown his glory, while the peasant is told by his blouse and soiled cap, and to save our very lives, we cannot help being impressed by the garbs of those we meet, and judging the wearers by them. One may be gifted with a vision which penetrates through this—but the mass of mankind are not, and to them the dress stands for its wearer, as with every man, however keen-sighted, it influences his judgment to some degree; and the more gifted we are with the power to pierce masks, the more readily we perceive and despise incongruity of the inner and the outer, so that we regard the wealthy peasant in his velvet blouse and cap, whose commonness no jewels will conceal, as more vulgar than if fortune had not raised him from the necessity of wearing cotton and greasy seal-skin, while we reverence the moneyless being who wraps his threadbare cloak around him with true regal dignity, and wears on his brow that glory of manhood whose feeble shadow a golden crown is.

Our feeling for dress is corrupted by the prevalent feeling of the time, as much as our morals or our politics; and there is, perhaps, no more decided means of taking the measure of the times, than this. When the *sans culottes* of the Reign of Terror marked a man as suspicious who wore a clean shirt, they knew that the apparel expressed the man, and that that one who refused to descend to the unwashed level, was capable of cherishing sentiments opposed to the dead degradation of their democracy, and they wisely put him out of

the way. We, in our own time, tell our idle, iron utility by the stiff, angular fashion of our clothes, and the obstinate, dogged defiance of the lines of ease and grace in every garment. And, in fact, every reform in dress seems to have in view some further subjugation of beauty to utility, and to consult for its motive rather fitness for the functions of toil, than for those of delight. Thus, the costume called the Bloomer sacrifices every element of dignity and grace, to the advantage of easier locomotion. Now, where unimpeded locomotion is the desideratum, we say to the ladies, by all means wear the Bloomer costume, if you like it; but, where you dress for the purpose of display or adorning, keep as far from it as possible. There is an "eternal fitness" in dress—it is beauty; there is, also, a temporary fitness—it is use; and, for our own part, we prefer even to see a dress trailing on a pavement, when its wearer is promenading, to seeing her display herself in a garb whose only superiority consists in its being more convenient for common uses. We have before given our reasons for calling the Bloomer costume ungraceful, and, therefore, need not give them here—but that any woman of taste could ever have persuaded herself that it was more beautiful than the simple flowing robe, is more than we can understand. If useful, wear it, when needed; but don't utilize dress for the promenade or the parlor, and consider it an artistic reform.

No, no! if we are going to reform, let it be towards beauty, instead of from it. We are willing to make some sacrifices of the lower uses—we are willing to give iron mines and mill-sites (if we had them) for châteaux in Spain, even; but this age has sold too many golden dreams for iron realities—it has fenced imagination in too closely with its wire-fences of telegraph and railroad. Give us, at least in dress, where curves need not be measured by a given radius, or fashioned to attain the highest speed of locomotion like the hull of a steamer, the full liberty to defy the utilitarianism and plainness that beset us on every side.

Since, therefore, it costs the same to dress ill as well—and since to dress in obedience to the laws of Art involves no de-

nial of dogmas or desecration of principles—and, as the right fashioning of our costume is the first grade of creative Art, we shall be at some pains, ere long, to investigate the Art of Dress; and though, in our democratic country, we cannot prescribe a standard which shall express that spiritual distinction of ranks, in the expression of which the true Philosophy of Apparel consists (since every one here is anxious to *appear* a king, whether he have a kingly soul or no), we may, at least, educate our sense of beauty and perception of fitness so far as to do that which is best for ourselves, and perceive the falsehood of the shams that surround us; for no serf can wear the royal robes, unless the blouse shall appear underneath, or put on the crown, without that he shall doff it unconsciously to the first heir to the throne whom he shall meet in the highway.

Yet, even to dress perfectly well, one must know oneself and his or her position with reference to that inner standard of nobility, before which democrat and autocrat go for nothing but men.

THE TRANSITION FROM THE UN-BEAUTIFUL TO THE BEAUTIFUL.

We have already adverted to the important place occupied by the transfusion of the human imagination into the meaningless forms of outward objects, and endeavored to show how those localities of Nature have become the resorts of poet and painter, where the observations of the human mind, the indulgences of fancy, and the meditations of the soul have invested the material of unsymmetrical forms with the elements of genuine beauty.

Within this category we must place all those mediocre, and even dull pictures of Nature, where the insignificance of outward forms, divested of their relations to history, tradition, or story, would, at first sight, offer a barren study.

If the house in which Shakspeare or Isaac Newton was born, were represented as the birth-place of some obscure yeoman, whose name or merits had never gone abroad, it could scarcely become an object of Art. If the rock on which the Pilgrims first landed, or the elm on the shores of the Delaware, beneath which Penn first treated with the Indians, had not been associated with those great national, poetical and picturesque events, we should look upon them merely as sensuous objects, the former, destitute of all symmetrical beauty, the latter, but an ordinary forest tree, and worthy of admiration only in its sensuous relations.

Rocks like the Pilgrims' Rock, may be found in numbers washed by the sea's surges, and trees like the noted elm present themselves, without eliciting more than ordinary admiration, such as is claimed by the every-day aspects of Nature.

Yet to that individual rock, thousands of pilgrims of this modern day resort, to gaze upon the material substance that treasures within itself so much history; and around that individual tree, while it stood,

for more than a century did the curious and antiquarian minds gather to admire the aged relic which was one of those memorials of primitive days, that address the mind by the instrumentality of the senses.

The spurious coins and spurious paintings, with the rust and dimness of age nicely imitated, antique carvings, and fashions of historical times, ingeniously fabricated by recent hands, but palmed upon a credulous age as genuine evidences of the past, are all to be placed among the indications of this love of an outward and visible semblance of transpired events. It matters not how rude the figure or substance be, which has been preserved to represent some traditional event, it becomes sacred to the eye and to the touch, and is treasured up among the lares of the dwelling.

All the various architectural styles, springing out of the circumstances of life, national conceptions of beauty, and the developments of the forms of one people out of those of another, are to this day preserved among us, and, as subjects of the Beautiful, survive, in our estimation, all other traces of past intellectual history. These visible representations of technical design among the peoples who have gone before us, we still imitate in our modern structures, less because they concur with our own wants, than from the striking evidences they constantly hold before us of the truth that past history was not a myth, but has left enduring symbols of its verity. From this infusion of mind into the objects of the outer world, and the intellectual influences they imbibe by contact with human events and observation, we draw the inference that there is always a principle in operation there, deriving its incitement from the human mind itself, on which we may found the transition from the un-Beautiful to the Beautiful.

We have above alluded to the characteristics of the Beautiful, in its intellectual point of view, apart from the idea of outward symmetrical form. We thus regard either the history, story, or poetical interest, of which the object is the material symbol, or we analyze the interior design or arrangement of some un-beautiful manifestation of Nature; and by being led into the disclosure of all those wonderful contrivances of perfect wisdom and marvellous adaptations which science lays open, the outwardly repulsive, with all its interior unveiled, becomes transcendently beautiful, received as a whole conception.

We often observe mounds of dry earth standing upon barren places or by the wayside, which, ungainly in their appearance, and rather repulsive to the eye, by the seemingly infestive character of their inmates, we pass by, as objects of the absolutely Un-beautiful, with nothing in or around to invest them with interest, or much less, to attract admiration. If, however, we avail ourselves of the arduous and patient researches of the entomologist, and learn the economy that governs the little kingdom of the ants, trace the spirit of affection and love that reigns throughout their character, observe their almost human modes of action, travel along their short lives from infancy to death, and sympathize with what resembles the emotions and passions of our own nature; we at once lose all contempt or disgust for the

ants' humble hillock, and are led imperceptibly into a sense of the Beautiful.

On the rough bark of some tree, we find the transparent shell of an insect, that is classed among the most ungainly of its species. It has cast off its old vestment after its appearance among the living forms that bask in the sun's light, and, for a brief summer, fills the air with its shrill music. To the superficial observer, the locust is a hideous creation; its hues and organic structure offer nothing attractive to the eye, and its whole exterior seems to repel all attempts to trace the Beautiful in its form or color.

But no sooner do we depart from the poesy of color and form, and enter into the science of Creation's history, economy, and marvellous developments in the life of this septennial visitor to earth, and trace the fine symbolical conceptions it gives rise to, than we find before us a subject of the intrinsically beautiful, and feel that we have passed from a barren to a fruitful subject.

Thus the whole telluric system is a continuous realm of beauty, the arrangements and plan within it a vast scale of the purest harmony for the soul's enjoyment, and the whole created plan so full and munificent, that the mere æsthetics of form and symmetrical lines constitute but a small subdivision of the grand scheme.

The infusion of mind into the forms of matter and substance, shows its peculiar influence in the species of thought it creates out of the old, primitive and unadorned domicile which Art has never clad with any of her fastidious ornaments, and where time has rendered every object antique.

That peculiar mnemonic tendency of the mind, to write its whole history on venerable and faded objects of mechanism, on a favorite tree or a bench beneath its shadows, is so strong a necessity of our nature, that our material surroundings become identified with our whole being.

Whatever is simple in structure, and least architectural, seems to be the most ready recipient of the mind's thoughts and affections. This seems explainable, on the ground that, where the natural design is of the utmost simplicity of form, it lies open to the reception of our thoughts and attachments, but where the conceptions of the imagination, such as the artist, the sculptor, or the accomplished artisan, impart to the furniture and decorations of the interior of a dwelling, fill every object around us, the thought becomes distracted. Instead of depositing its own sensations and experiences amid the inanimate companions of its life's solitude, as it never fails to do where the objects are simple and destitute of artistic design, the very elegance of architectural ornaments, and the multiform *bizarerie* of household Art, repel the warmer emotions of home-life, and that peculiar infusion of thought into callous forms, which constitutes such a large portion of its deeply-seated affections.

The mind thus deposits its conceptions of the Beautiful, not in forms created after the ideal of him who designs, but in outward objects that time, tradition and history have invested with the memories of the past. The records of a whole life are associated with the simplest and most rude material devices, and when such revelations of hidden poesy and tradition are made, a